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SUBJECT: SYG SELECTION: GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONCERNS ABOUT THE
SELECTION PROCESS

REF: A. USUN-IO/UNP EMAIL APRIL 20
[1](#)B. USUN 766

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Bolton, Permanent Representative,
for reasons 1.4 b,d.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. The General Assembly (GA) met April 19, under the auspices of one of the working groups created by the September 2005 Summit Document, to discuss "the role of the GA in the selection of the Secretary-General." Delegations in New York, particularly India, lamenting the "demise" of the GA's authority and complaining of Security Council "encroachment" have seized on the process of selecting the next Secretary-General as an opportunity to "reassert the GA's authority." A number of other delegations, including Canada, are also publicly advocating changes that would give the process more "transparency and legitimacy." Jordan's Prince Zeid brought some reality back into the room by reminding the GA that it did not have a proud track record in electing its own presidents. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The General Assembly's Working Group on GA Revitalization held an informal discussion Wednesday, April 19, on "the role of the GA in the selection of the Secretary-General." The working group's co-chairs, Yemen and

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Latvia, read out the "minutes" of the meeting between Chinese Amb Wang (as Security Council President) and GA President Eliasson. The Security Council had agreed that Wang should orally brief Eliasson on the progress on SYG selection to date. Wang's presentation, as relayed by the co-chairs, closely mirrored previous discussions in the Security Council (ref B), noted that the Security Council hoped to make its recommendation by late September or early October, and reinforced the Security Council's commitment to follow the Charter provisions for the selection process. Wang also noted that the Security Council intended to recommend one candidate to the GA (as called for in GA Resolution 11(1) of 1946).

Canada's Five-Step Plan:
Favorable, but tepid, reviews

[1](#)3. (U) Canadian Ambassador Rock, who had previously circulated a non-paper on SYG selection and is seen as a leading proponent of change here in New York, opened his comments by recognizing that the Security Council "plays an eliminatory role in the process" and "only those persons with whom the Council can work effectively should be recommended for appointment." He then presented an ambitious five-point plan for a revised selection process in the GA, which called

for the GA to define the qualities it seeks in a SYG, establish a search committee to identify candidates, hold hearings with candidates prior to the Security Council's recommendation, establish a "cut-off date" by which candidates must declare themselves and consider limiting the SYG to a single term in office.

¶4. (U) Rock admitted that only limited changes were possible in the short-term, suggesting that the GA should address the question of the term of appointment (recommending a single term of five or seven years) and convene public fora for candidates to present themselves and their ideas during this selection process. He noted that Canada had considered whether to request the Security Council to provide more than one name in its recommendation, but had decided that the current practice was most appropriate. And he suggested that candidates, when announcing their intention to run for the office, should also declare their choice for Deputy SYG at the same time. This would "further increase the confidence of member states in the process" and "broaden the support for this senior 'team', once in office." The idea of a two-person "slate" garnered some additional support, but was opposed by Algeria, among others.

¶5. (U) Austria (for the EU), Switzerland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Argentina, and Costa Rica similarly called for "greater transparency" in the process, but stopped short of demanding specific changes. The EU called the Canadian proposals "interesting." The Swiss helpfully noted that the SYG needed the confidence of the Security Council, "particularly its permanent members" in order to be effective. These delegations also tended to support implementation of GA Resolution 51/241 (1997), which includes specific, though limited, proposals regarding the process.

¶6. (U) In their statements, Asian and African delegations consistently reiterated their support for an Asian candidate to be the next SYG, consistent with their 1996 agreement. Mongolia's intervention drew quiet laughter in the group with its specific comparisons between the SYG selection process and "how we, as a former Communist nation, used to have our Presidents chosen."

India Leads the Rhetorical Charge for More Aggressive Changes

¶7. (U) Egypt called for more dramatic changes to the process, in particular for the Security Council to recommend to the GA "not less than three" candidates (rather than just one). This call was echoed by Pakistan, Cuba, Belarus and Malaysia. Indonesia noted that the GA "should not be afraid" of getting more than one name.

¶8. (U) It was Indian Permanent Representative Sen, however, who made similar points in the most aggressive tone of the day. Sen cast the discussion of the SYG process as part of the "continual encroachment" of the Security Council into the affairs and prerogatives of the GA. He said the recent Oil-for-Food investigation "concluded" that the SYG lacked the authority necessary to run the program, "because the Security Council, particularly the P-5, did not give it to him." Sen argued that this meant, "We need a SYG not subject to those pressures." The next SYG needed to be selected by a process that would give him the "moral authority" to resist pressure from the Security Council and avoid becoming "the P-5's official executioner."

¶9. (U) Sen said that the 1946 resolution that laid out the selection parameters "belonged to the past" as a relic of the Cold War. Today, he said, a SYG did not need to balance East vs. West, but must be able to "straddle the North/South divide." The SYG needs to be responsive to the whole membership and therefore selected in the GA. As an example of the need to involve the GA, he argued: "When the P-5 played a role in creating a new body, we have the Peacebuilding Commission. When the GA played a role, we got the Human Rights Council. The difference is palpable." The

views of the Security Council "are inadequate to the point of being totally irrelevant." The Security Council "claims to be on the side of the angels," he said, "but if so, they are fallen angels."

¶10. (U) Sen called for a revision of the 1946 resolution and for the Security Council to submit three names to the GA. "I must disagree strongly with Canada," he added. Agreeing to Canada's proposals would give only the "impression" of revitalization. He called the Canadian proposal a "blind alley for the present."

Sometimes, Truth Hurts

¶11. (U) As the final speaker, Jordan's Prince Zeid introduced a refreshing dose of reality into the debate when he said that - for all the apparent limitations in the selection process - the organization has had very capable and effective Secretaries-General. The same, he noted, could not be said

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of the Presidents of the General Assembly.

Comment

¶12. (C) Currently, the most radical of the proposals (including the call for the Security Council to recommend more than one name) do not have broad support in the GA. The Canadians were quietly disappointed that their "modest" proposals were not picked up by more delegations, most of whom seemed content to use the session as a rhetorical opportunity to complain about the Security Council's continued "encroachment." One Canadian officer told us afterwards that they were not interested in being used by the Indians and others who clearly had a non-productive agenda. USUN continues to believe that any formalized process in the GA would have the effect of potentially limiting the field of candidates (to the future detriment of the organization). In addition, any limitation on "eleventh-hour" candidates needs to be resisted, as it might unhelpfully tie the Security Council's hands in attempting to identify and agree on a candidate.

¶13. (C) Responsible delegations expressed appreciation for the readout of the Wang-Eliasson discussion on the Security Council's process to date and said they hoped it signaled a willingness to keep that channel of communication open. In addition, it was noteworthy that nearly every statement made reference to the importance of adhering to the Charter language on the selection process. Asked by the press about the GA's calls for more involvement in the process, Ambassador Bolton noted that the Charter called for the Security Council to recommend a Secretary-General to the GA and "that's what we'll do." End Comment.
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